



COUNCIL COMMITTEE REPORT
COMMITTEE ON OPEN SPACE, ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY

Date: September 28, 2016

Agenda Item #: 6

Agenda Item: Briefing and discussion regarding the Lower Shoal Creek Flood Mitigation Study (Watershed Protection Department).

Vote No vote was taken.

Sponsors/Department: Watershed Protection Department

Presenters: Pam Kearfott, Supervising Engineer, Watershed Protection Department, and Joe Pantalione, Director, Watershed Protection Department.

Summary of Discussion

- Joe Pantalione, Director of the Watershed Protection Department (WPD) introduced the topic and explained the FY17 budget includes funding for an updated study for lower Shoal Creek, which is one of the city's most severe flooding problems. WPD wanted to give the Committee and interested stakeholders an idea of the timeline and scope of the study, as well as how the department will incorporate stakeholder input into the process.
- Pam Kearfott, Supervising Engineer for the Creek Flood Hazard Mitigation program, gave a short history of flooding on Shoal Creek. The 1981 Memorial Day Flood claimed over one dozen lives, and hundreds of businesses and homes were either destroyed or severely damaged. Since 1981, the city has implemented more than \$65 million worth of flood mitigation projects throughout the watershed.
- Despite that investment, lower Shoal Creek from 15th Street to the river is still among the highest priority flooding areas in the city. Approximately 80 structures are modeled to be flooded during an 100-year event, and approximately 50 structures during a 10-year event. In addition, many bridges overtop in as frequent as a 2-year event.
- Mrs. Kearfott explained that the purpose of a feasibility study is to fully define what the risk is, what the mitigation goals are, and the strategies for achieving those goals. The department's overarching flood mitigation goal is to provide protection up to the 100-year flood, but there are some places where this is not achievable. One of the important scoping questions going forward is what level of protection to provide to the project area.

- Possible mitigation strategies include detention ponds, channel modifications, bridge improvements, channel diversions, floodwalls, and property buyouts.
- Shoal Creek is very large and very developed, with twice as much flow as Waller Creek. There is very little remaining land available in the upstream portion of the watershed for more detention. It is also very “flashy”, meaning that there is less warning time to activate and perform evacuations. This presents a real challenge from an early-warning perspective, especially given the amount of tourism in this area.
- The initial scoping with the project team is anticipated to be completed by late 2016. An external kick-off meeting and final scoping is expected early 2017. The project website is located at www.austintexas.gov/shoalcreekfloods
- Vice Chair Garza asked about floodwalls in the city. Mrs. Kearfott answered that there is on Loyola east of 183 and another on Williamson Creek north of William Cannon and west of Pleasant Valley.
- Bill Moriarty asked if there were any cost projections at this point. Mrs. Kearfott responded that she is hesitant to answer that at this early point in the study because it has not yet been decided what level of protection to provide. The cost to provide 100-year protection would likely be on the order of \$150 million.
- Mr. Pantalione stressed that this question of what level of protection to provide comes down to value decisions and judgements. The department needs to look at what it takes to provide that protection for the 100-year storm, but also for the 50-year or 20-year protection. As you come down in terms of level of protection, the solutions may be more palatable in terms of impacts to the greenbelt, parks, and recreational resources.
- Chair Pool asked for some follow-up information from staff regarding the stability of bridges in the area. Mr. Pantalione responded that they would touch base with the Public Work’s Department, which inspects and repairs the bridges.
- Mr. Pantalione also mentioned that the department manages a web-based map-viewer that allows the public to explore the location and severity of flooding problems.
<http://austin.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapJournal/index.html?appid=d45481abb0804c95a8e6b033188982b9>

Speakers

None.

Direction

None.

Recommendation

There was no recommendation to the full Council.